DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 878 HE 019 243

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TITLE Interdisciplinary General Education: A Method of Faculty Development. ASHE 1986 Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Feb 86
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (San Antonio, TX, February 20-23, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Development; *College Faculty; *Faculty Development; *General Education; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Interprofessional Relationship; Job Satisfaction; Private Colleges; Professional Development; Program Effectiveness; *Teacher Motivation
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting; Collegiality

ABSTRACT

The effect of participation in interdisciplinary general education programs on personal and professional development of faculty was investigated at Denison University (Ohio), Earlham College (Indiana), and Kenyon College (Ohio). Faculty members teaching interdisciplinary general education courses in these private liberal arts colleges were compared with matched nonparticipants at the colleges on such dimensions as professional goals/objectives, career development/satisfaction, and sources of reward. Personal interviews were conducted with a schedule constructed on the basis of adult and life stage theory. While there were more similarities than differences between the two groups, participants reported increased vitality, higher intellectual stimulation, increased respect for other disciplines, and taking on new teaching techniques. Specifically teaching in the program resulted in: a greater sense of collegiality resulting from involvement with faculty in their own and other disciplines; teaching outside one's field resulted in a return to the role of co-learner and a model for students; discussion type teaching strategies were enhanced since the interdisciplinary courses emphasized writing and reading skills; and course development in interdisciplinary and other special interest areas was expanded. Implications for practice and theory are discussed. (SW)

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Interdisciplinary General Education:

A Method of Faculty Development

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, February 20-23, 1986. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Abstract

This study compared faculty teaching in interdisciplinary general education courses in three liberal arts colleges with matched non-participants in the same institutions on such dimensions as professional goals and objectives, career development and satisfaction, and sources of reward. Personal interviews were conducted with a schedule constructed on the basis of adult and life stage theory. While there were more similarities than differences between the two groups, participants reported increased vitality, higher intellectual stimulation, increased respect for other disciplines, and taking on new teaching techniques. Implications for practice and theory are discussed.

Interdisciplinary General Education:
A Method of Faculty Development

Introduction

College faculty, like the other types of professionals to which they compare themselves, have an on-going need to strengthen their career commitment by remaining challenged and stimulated, even in the face of shifting events in American higher education. Tenured faculty particularly may begin to search for different goals which will inspire them and capture their intellectual energies, a tendency supported by life stage theorists who point to a sequential development of needs and expectations which must be realized if the individual is to experience both satisfaction and motivation over the life span.

In the past the prospect of an appointment at another institution could serve as motivation to remain professionally competitive and active. A different position offers a new set of courses, contacts, and colleagues to help keep one "on top" of the field. Opportunities for faculty mobility, however, have become fewer and fewer. With high tenure rates evident in all institutions and the reduction--at times even elimination--of positions, the chance for most faculty to take up teaching responsibilities in another setting has been lost. The result is that, though the goals of faculty renewal have not changed, the means for reaching them have become more restricted. (Of

course, faculty wishing to stay at their institution also have life stages and need renewal.)

Faculty development programs have been established on many campuses to provide enrichment and alternatives from regular responsibilities. Unfortunately, the costs of implementing these programs may place a financial hardship on institutions already under severe strain. If a curriculum plan can offer some of the same benefits promised in a formal faculty development program, then serious exploration of this phenomenon is warranted.

A renewed interest in general education, reinforced by a document issued by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer and Levine, 1981), led to curriculum re-design at many colleges. A number developed altered general education programs, including an interdisciplinary core. (The publicity given related reports from AAC, NEH, and NIE are likely to spark more reforms.) The rationale behind interdisciplinary general education is that it prepares liberally educated persons who are better able to consider historical perspectives and global issues from multiple perspectives. Advocates of interdisciplinary studies believe that the mingling of disciplines and academic backgrounds of participating faculty offers a unique and rich climate of learning for faculty as well as for students.

Selecting interdisciplinary general education programs as a means for fostering faculty development can be explained in this way: it was anticipated that the array of methodologies utilized in the context of multiple disciplines would yield greater results in the areas of personal growth and career satisfaction for participants than non-participants because of the demands placed on the faculty who teach in a discipline other than their own; the regular, systematic, and professional associations with colleagues from other fields; and the application of different or additional teaching strategies.

The research question guiding the study can be expressed in these terms:

> In what ways does participation in interdisciplinary general education programs contribute to personal and professional faculty development?

The Setting and the Population

The three institutions in the study--Denison, Earlham, and Kenyon--are of comparable size and character. They were studied with the expectation that a link could be established between participation in interdisciplinary general education programs and the faculty members' perception of personal and professional development. Each is a well-endowed, stable, private liberal arts college with a student enrollment between 1,500 and 2,000.

Each institution can point to traditions of administrative support for innovations and a mission statement reflecting a clear commitment to humanistic education.

Because of the number of institutions which could qualify for the study, geographical considerations were one of the compelling factors in determining the sample. The three institutions selected share a common consortium (The Great Lakes College Association) and they were accessible to the researcher. Program characteristics at the institutions met three other considerations: (a) they had been in operation three years or more; (b) the interdisciplinary general education courses met graduation requirements; and (c) there was willing cooperation from a sample of both participant and non-participant groups.

Information was obtained from interviews with a matched sample of participants and non-participants at each institution, college catalogues and other institutional data, and descriptive materials on the interdisciplinary general education programs. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with a uniform schedule utilizing closed and open ended questions which furnished quantitative and qualitative results. External influences such as curriculum design, institutional reward structure, and faculty development opportunities were considered as integral elements of the interview questionnaire, as were internal factors like career stage, prior interdisciplinary

general education experience as undergraduates, and motivation to participate. These and other themes are developed more fully in the analysis of outcomes.

A total of 67 faculty were interviewed. With one exception, all agreed to have the conversation taped. Response to the request for interviews exceeded the requirements of the design, and in the final analysis only those interviews were used which could be part of a matched sample. While each of the colleges had different interdisciplinary courses, they were alike in that they were primarily for entering students and had broad liberal education aims. Faculty teaching in them did so voluntarily, except for the English and history faculty at Earlham who knew this would be a requirement when they took a position at the college. At Kenyon the course was optional for students; at Denison there was a set of five to select from; and at Earlham the course was required of all. There were more participating faculty from the humanities than from the other disciplines. Despite these differences, for purposes of analysis, the faculty are pooled as if they were all a part of one and the same enterprise, the critical difference being whether they were or were not participants in an interdisciplinary course.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Findings

During the course of the interview, faculty were given a card on which they could express on a scale of 5 to 1 how salient each of a number of experiences were for them, 5 being very strong and 1 being minor or not experienced. On the whole, faculty showed more similarities on assorted dimensions related to their experience and attitudes regarding their career than they did differences, as may be observed in Table 2.[1]

(Insert Table 2 about here)

This finding was not unexpected since they share similar environments and must meet comparable professional expectations. For example, when the criterion for promotion and tenure is scholarly production, all faculty are evaluated on their success in meeting that standard. If, however, teaching skill is viewed more seriously--and can be adequately measured to satisfy both the faculty and the administration--then another set of priorities dictates who will be rewarded. In either case, both groups (participants and non-participants) have been affected by prevailing currents of innovation and stress and have been involved in the adoption of college-wide requirements and discussions of the institutional mission vis-a-vis the curriculum.

Despite these forces acting to produce uniformities, participants indicate that they have experienced renewed

vitality, new relationships, intellectual stimulation, increased respect/tolerance for other disciplines, and the use of new teaching strategies with greater frequency than do non-participants, who rate themselves as overworked and more involved in non-teaching activities (see the *'ed and **'ed items in Table 2.)

In addition, respondents shared the perception that college administrators have displayed an unusual interest in and support of interdisciplinary general education. This has been communicated in obvious ways such as support of requests for outside funding and provision of internal budgetary resources. Accommodations have also been made to individuals and departments on staffing needs. Some participants and non-participants believe that administrators have promoted dissemination of materials on the programs as one way of enhancing the institutional image and also to attract better students from an ever-shrinking pool of traditional college-age youth. Not all respondents agree with these observations, but most believe that the programs add to rather than detract from institutional vitality and stability. To a surprising degree, college administrators were free from the typical criticism of lack of support.

Differences Between Participants and Non-participants

The assembled data present more similarities than differences between the participant and non-participant groups.

Yet it is important to note that participants perceive themselves as more satisfied with their careers than their colleagues do, and they expressed that in a variety of ways.

The combination of events can be cited which meant, for the participants, increased feelings of satisfaction with their careers and with the institutions where they teach. Dimensions of career satisfaction were explored in three different questions on the interview schedule

1. When asked to rate their careers (See Table 3), 24 participants compared to 16 non-participants chose "very rewarding."

(Insert Table 3 about here)

2. Participants were uniformly higher on every satisfaction scale dealing with present position, with the college, and with career choice, as seen in Table 4.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

3. On the anecdotal list of items (Table 2), 18 participants expressed increased satisfaction with their positions as opposed to 15 of the non-participants.

The Participant Group

A complex set of characteristics operates to explain why some faculty choose to participate and others do not. Participants who choose to become involved definitely do so for other than financial reasons. According to their own statements, participants embrace the opportunity as one with

> unusual appeal because it permits them to explore new fields and an enlarged range of pedagogies with the endorsement of colleagues and administrators. Each time I approach a new semester, I look for new ways to enhance the teaching process of myself and the students. Sometimes that means looking for new opportunities where you are challenged to move outside your area. Three years ago I was beginning to feel a little stale in that respect, so I participated in the pilot program. That was very useful for me in terms of shaking me out of some patterns and getting me to think about materials in new ways.
>
> IPHS [interdisciplinary course name] gave me my liberal education. On an intellecutal level, the program has exposed me to more viewpoints, methodologies, problems, limitations, jargon, vocabulary, styles, approaches, and other facets of looking at problems. I must teach differently if I am using materials I am not expected to have mastery over. To what extent am I a facilitator or a disseminator of information? I must reflect all the time on this. I may use non-structure, super-structure, whatever will pique student interests.

Further, interdisciplinary general education programs provide faculty with personal challenge at the same time they provide the institution with a distinctive curriculum.

On the other hand, non-participants explained their lack of involvement in various ways, pointing to discipline-based obligations, lack of interest, and uncertainty about their success in the program.

> Personally I would not want to teach in the program. I don't think my teaching abilities really are strong in the kinds of things that I see going on. Voluntary involvement is a good idea.

Rather than suffer in the students' eyes because they cannot claim expertise, participating faculty have apparently gained

> respect from their students and from their peers. The students have a fairly high regard for the program and for the survival of it. They like the idea of interdisciplinary work and the opportunity to bounce off ideas in a climate of serious inter-change. This is anecdotal evidence, but some faculty have claimed that the best and the most able, some of the better students they have in their seminars, have been or are in IPHS.

Participants, as role models, demonstrate a willingness to be risk takers, not in the sense of sacrificing security or jeopardizing careers, but as professionals willing to expose gaps in their own learning. Faculty and students explore together problems and issues which are without absolute answers as they learn how to approach and to begin to solve some of humanity's deepest concerns together.

> Freshman Studies [interdisciplinary course name] is a statement that we are concerned about the freshman year experience. We hope that students' work can be built on in subsequent levels, assuming a set of skills and attitudes which encourage serious academic work. Intellectually and ideally, if the program allows students to see beyond the disciplines, to see the interconnectiveness of knowledge, the relationships of learning through the historical process, the meaning of science in relationship to the arts, and the like, well, that's what liberal learning has always been about.

That experience of sharing and growing has led to faculty perceptions that interdisciplinary general education teaching is a source of their personal and professional development:

> I think that teaching in the program has definitely been faculty development; for some, very very much. This is the testimony that some members of the program themselves have given, both speaking privately to me and in public meetings. Some of them said they went into the program with a pretty rigid mindset on certain issues, and they were

> confronted by people with sharply different views--faculty and students--that brought them out of that rigidity. I found these very eloquent testimonies.
> I began to develop an awareness of a discipline with greater intimacy, which was a significant development for me. I can point to how Humanities [interdisciplinary course name] has been personally enriching as well because of the readings required and the perspective needed for a more interdisciplinary approach to other courses.

Participants describe the powerful influence of collaborative, active learning strategies compared to prior experience in a competitive climate or one in which faculty do not seem to be excited about their teaching.

> The faculty are required and willing to sacrifice their comforts and their interests in order to achieve a larger good. There is an intellectual solidarity and a fanatic community of teachers involved in this. I think for many people the joys of working together with colleagues from other departments were a real surprise.

Reports of such happenings are not isolated instances. They come from participants in every program. Some non-participants corroborated what their discipline colleagues reported.

> The program has brought colleagues together across discipline lines that otherwise would not have dealt with each other in that professional way. I've seen several colleagues develop new interests and attitudes. I would like to see other programs model that one, especially in a time when we are concerned about budgetary issues and shrinking demographics.

Several respondents expressed that successful participation is related to how much the professor expects to gain form the experience.

> I suppose you could describe me as a self-starter, an initiator, someone who is interested in working

> "on the edge" of the discipline. My perception is that those who participate are doing it for the love of the program and what it could do to broaden them. People who are interested in being vitalized by anything they do will benefit, if they go into it expectantly, hopefully, voluntarily.

If one enters it hopefully, enthusiastically, believing the program's potential for producing uncommon personal and professional results, there is a greater likelihood that these goals will be achieved. If, on the other hand, individuals feel under some duress to become engaged, they may respond less creatively and thus show smaller gains.

> Because the course involves an enormous consumption of time and resources, I would really like to have faculty who want released time doing it, without departments being penalized for that. We may have to go to a rotational basis to share the burdens.

Faculty/Career Development

Higher education literature began a decade ago to focus on adult learning patterns of career and personal growth. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee (1978) described and analyzed the key events or stages in a man's life. Although the authors did not claim that the model served as a faculty development theory, the analysis invites that inference, and comparisons were made. References to this intensive research project, along with essays and studies conducted by Neugarten (1968), Hodgkinson (1974), and Gould (1978), appeared with some frequency in higher education publications, setting forth common themes or stages in adult development. The recognition that

these patterns also rang true in academe was used to account for the progression of events in most faculty careers. Baldwin's (1979) study charts the five stages of faculty growth, pointing to the period of mid-career when professors recognize the need to break from daily routines in order to maintain professional vitality.

In the Levinson study, the authors assert that, though there is no single model which applies to every individual, there are general themes for individual lives:

> The components of the life structure, like threads in a tapestry, are woven into an encompassing design. Recurring themes in various sectors help to unify the overall patterns of the tapestry. Lives differ widely in the nature and patterns of the components (1977:44).

Men in their sample spoke of events which shaped their careers, and they noted periods of transition. For many a distinct experience either marked a change or signaled a need for some shift. At times these occurrences were seen only in reflection; that is, the interviewees may not have been aware of the happenings until they had passed. In other cases, the man actively sought a change and attempted to take control of affairs.

The term "life cycle" was consciously chosen by the researchers because it was considered most appropriate for conveying the notion of individual life development through

numerous periods, marked by specific events, relationships, achievements, and failures that are common experiences for most adults. Moreover, "cycle" and "season" are words which describe a process at work, one subject to many influences along the way. The authors looked closely at the mid years, between 30 and 50, generally parelleling the age range for this study.

As the researchers progressed with their findings, they were led from an idea of a "steady, continuous process of development to the idea of qualitatively different periods of development (1977:41)." As has been illustrated for certain faculty in this study, a qualitative difference in career satisfaction and personal enrichment was related to their participation in interdisciplinary general education.

During the past decade faculty development programs have become a mainstay at hundreds of colleges and universities, at first as instructional improvement innovations and later as embedded programs meeting the expectations of faculty and administrators (Berquist and Phillips, 1975; Centra, 1976; Freedman, Brown, Ralph, Shukraft, Bloom and Sanford, 1977; Gaff, 1975; Nelson and Siegel, 1980). Over time practitioners have come to realize that development is not restricted to classroom experiences. Programs have been vastly expanded to include activities and interests that can benefit the entire institution. The enhancement of institutional objectives

through faculty development has received much attention (Fuller, 1983; Furniss, 1981; Nelsen, 1981).

Still another vital aspect of faculty development programs is that of meeting professors' personal needs. Those too young to retire, yet already committed or entrenched in academe, are especially attracted to well-planned programs. For the professor at 35 who needs something other than traditional course offerings to "capture his interest and occupy his time for 35 years of further employment by the institution" (Furniss, 1981:18), alternatives are clearly desirable.

When Freedman and colleagues (1977) interviewed faculty at Mills, Stanford and Berkeley about their career interests and early career aspirations, they searched for clues about what might have led the respondents to the stages they were engaged in. The findings revealed that faculty needed a greater awareness of themselves and their social surroundings to increase their autonomy and broaden their perspective on the world. The researchers conclude that faculty development will ultimately make professors better teachers, researchers, and educators (1977:135).

The academic work environment shapes a culture which is to some extent universally shared by professors at every level of higher education. That culture is defined by the customs and practices which prevail regardless of the enrollment, academic mission, or sponsorship of the enterprise. Observers of the

phenomena have studied it beginning with socialization patterns established during the graduate school years (Light, 1974:258-263). Academics aspiring to careers as professors quickly discern the levels of gradation in rank and responsibility, the practices of colleagueship, and the independence valued and protected by their mentors. Much of the process is an unconscious one, as modeling often is. But ingrained patterns led to expectation of a comparable career and accompanying lifestyle.

Baldwin (1979) first melded the themes of professional development and personal career stages, documenting the need for faculty to be stimulated and encouraged at certain important stages. His work serves as a basis for determining the model career. Faculty members daily contend with personal, professional and organization concerns. Goals of faculty development may be achieved without sacrificing any one for another. Faculty expect to be responsible for their areas of expertise and to be rewarded for strong performance. They value the command they have over their teaching schedules and committee responsibilities. At the same time, they look forward to periodic opportunities for professional renewal through sabbaticals and faculty development resources.

Initially career stage was thought to be a major factor regarding participation and non-participation in the programs, since there is evidence that mid-career faculty have special

needs for renewal (Nelsen and Siegel, 1980; Nelsen, 1981, Blackburn, 1981). Except for the fact that respondents tend to cluster in the mid-ranks and average between 13-17 years of experience at their respective institutions, no obvious patterns of career stage differences surfaced from the data analysis. The two groups were comparable regarding reasons they enjoy the profession, attitudes about faculty development, and assessment of institutional approval of interdisciplinary general education. It may be that these and other factors served to obscure or militate against identifying precise career stage events. Still, theory is not corroborated by this investigation.

Summary of Findings

Participants can point to a number of ways in which involvement in programs has contributed to their own personal and professional development. The following assertions summarize their statements about how teaching in the program can lead to faculty development:

1. A greater sense of collegiality developed through involvement with faculty in their own and other disciplines within the college.

2. Teaching outside one's field resulted in a return to the role of co-learner and a model for students.

3. Since the interdisciplinary courses had an emphasis on writing and reading skills, discussion type teaching strategies were enhanced.

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2. Teaching outside one's field resulted in a return to the role of co-learner and a model for students.

3. Since the interdisciplinary courses had an emphasis on writing and reading skills, discussion type teaching strategies were enhanced.

4. Course development in interdisciplinary and other special interest areas was expanded.

5. More congruence with career desires was achieved through the development of (a) new interests and the reinforcement of latent tendencies; (b) an increased appreciation of many disciplines, contrary to one's own narrow traditional graduate school training; and (c) closer relationships with students through tutorial and discussion sessions, leading possibly to greater impact on students.

6. Participants' personal contribution to the liberal arts mission of the college resulted in a merger of individual and institutional goals.

Discussion

The study has obvious limitations. First, although there are many possibilities for pursuing faculty development, only one aspect was looked at closely. Emphasis was placed on the individuals involved, although certainly impacts extend to the institution as a whole.

Second, only one of several forms of general education, viz., those involving an interdisciplinary component, was examined.

In addition, the liberal arts colleges under investigation are considered stable institutions in enrollment and financial standing. They typify Rudolph's (1981:12) example of the best

liberal arts colleges as ones which are true to their traditional roles as self-conscious institutions committed to preparing leaders who will fulfill the expectations of a democratic society.

Finally, this study relied on evidence gained from self-reports and perceptions--anecdotal, descriptive, personal--with more reliance on qualitative than quantitative data.

Still, a need for faculty revitalization is well-established at the same time that the resources needed to accomplish that goal are less certain. An especially appealing feature in the use of a curriculum plan for faculty development is that personal needs of intellectual inquiry and colleagueship can be combined in a program which also enhances the institutional mission. Interdisciplinary general education programs offer considerable potential in this regard.

Footnotes

[1]The statistics reported here are simply descriptive and are not tests of significant differences. The "*" and "**" simply call attention to factors where the percentages are more noticably different between groups.

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Table 1

Population Characteristics

Faculty Rank		
	Participants	Non-participants
Full professor	17	14
Associate Professor	9	11
Assistant Professor	3	5
Other	1	0

Disciplinary Representation		
	Participants	Non-participants
Humanities	19	10
Arts	2	6
Natural Sciences	5	10
Social Sciences	4	4

Table 2

Reports from Participants (P) and Non-participants (NP)

	5		4		3		2		1		No Response	
	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP	P	NP
Personal growth	10	6	12	14	6	7	0	2	0	0	2	1
Renewed vitality	17	5	5	7	2	10	3	2	1	1	2	5
More involved in non-teaching activities**	1	8	6	6	6	4	8	7	6	4	3	1
New relationships*	16	6	11	1	3	14	0	4	0	4	0	1
Overworked**	4	7	8	9	7	7	8	2	1	3	2	2
Intellectual stimulation*	17	10	9	9	2	8	1	1	0	1	1	2
Increased respect/ tolerance for other disciplines*	12	3	8	9	1	8	0	2	5	2	4	6
Sacrificed interests in own field	2	4	6	4	12	8	6	6	2	7	3	1
New teaching strategies*	4	7	16	7	8	10	0	5	0	0	2	1
New research	5	3	6	8	5	8	11	4	3	4	0	3
Difficult relationships with colleagues	3	0	2	4	4	7	4	6	15	11	2	2
Increased satisfaction with career	7	5	11	10	6	11	3	1	1	0	2	3

*P > NP
**NP > P

Table 3

Rating of Career

	Participants		Non-Participants	
	N	%	N	%
Very rewarding	24	80	16	54
Generally positive	6	20	12	40
Somewhat positive	0	0	1	3
Minimally positive	0	0	1	3
Total	30	100	30	100

Table 4

Ratings of Satisfaction

Participants

	Highly Satisfied		Usually Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Dissatisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
With present position	13	43	15	50	2	7	0	0
With teaching in the program	15	50	11	37	4	13	0	0
With the college	10	33	18	60	2	7	0	0
With career choice	19	63	10	33	0	0	0	0

Non-participants

	Highly Satisfied		Usually Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Dissatisfied	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
With present position	9	30	15	50	6	20	0	0
With the college	11	37	14	47	4	13	1	3
With career choice	16	53	12	40	2	7	0	0

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